# The Dragon's Pearl

## Lake Tahoe, Tahoe National Forest

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### THE DRAGON'S PEARL

by

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What's that? A sea monster in Lake Tahoe? Well, yes. Each season about half a dozen Tahoe basin residents and visitors report seeing something large, dark, and sinuous swimming in the lake, briefly showing itself, then disappearing beneath the waves. These sightings of "Tahoe Tessie," as she is called (after Loch Ness's "Nessie") have caused quite a stir. On the one hand, those who have seen Tessie naturally believe in her existence, and a Tahoe Tessie Museum and phone hotline for sightings have been established in Kings Beach on the north shore of the lake. On the other hand, some skeptics claim that Tessie eyewitnesses are mistaking logs or waves for sea monsters. Washoe Indian legends speak of monsters inhabiting the lake; local author John Roush argues that Tessie is really just a rogue giant sturgeon.

And so the debate continues. Perhaps someday Lake Tahoe will be graced with a visit by the International Society of Cryptozoology, an organization that investigates such matters, and some progress will be made in solving the mystery. Then again, scientists with the U.C. Davis Tahoe Research Group under Professor Charles Goldman came to the lake in 1984 to investigate Tessie, but their study was inconclusive.

In the meantime, we are all free to examine the evidence for ourselves, and come to our own conclusions. Now I have never seen Tessie myself, but nevertheless I am quite sure that she is out there, feeding off the mouth of Emerald Bay, or cavorting in the depths of Zephyr Cove, or perhaps exploring the legendary hole in the bottom of the lake in Carnelian Bay. How can I be sure? Read on.

Western Europeans have generally regarded dragons and sea monsters as forces of darkness, chaos and destruction, enemies of civilization that must be hunted down and destroyed. Marduck, Gilgamesh, Hercules, Beowulf, St. George, the knights of the Round Table-- many western heroes have been dragon slayers. The ancient Greeks believed that if one planted dragon's teeth in the ground, a crop of armed warriors would suddenly spring up and attack anything in sight. And anyone who has ever visited the area will agree that there is no such destructive creature residing in Lake Tahoe.

The Chinese, on the other hand, regarded the dragon as a noble, benevolent creature,

capable of conferring great blessings on mankind. Dragons controlled the weather and the courses of rivers, and possessed great wealth. The Chinese also describe a stone called the dragon's pearl, a large jewel of great power, usually carried by the dragon in the folds beneath its chin. The pearl glowed with light from within, was a vessel of health, and anything it touched grew and multiplied.

Once, in the south of Szechwan Province, a Chinese boy lived with his mother on a small farm. Every day the boy went to draw water from the river, and on his way back home, he stopped at a meadow to cut grass for his solitary goat. Eventually he noticed a remarkable thing about the meadow: it was always lush, green, and pleasant, no matter how hot the summer or how cold the winter, and no matter how poorly the areas around it fared. The meadow seemed to bask in a state of perpetual spring. After thinking about it for a few days, the boy decided to plant his vegetables in the meadow, so that they would thrive like the other plants there.

As he dug in this meadow to plant his vegetables, his spade suddenly revealed a beautiful, glowing sphere. He picked it up, and it was warm in his hand. The boy had found the dragon's pearl that had caused the meadow to flourish.

And who can doubt that there is a dragon's pearl hidden somewhere in the enchanting Tahoe basin? Whose azure waters keep it always cool in the summer, and warm in the winter, and whose skies are sunny more than 300 days a year. Whose forests and trails stretch and wind off into the silent wilderness, and whose soaring slopes have never heard of poison oak or rattlesnakes. Whose mighty vistas charm the spirit, and where every day holds the promise of multitudinous blessings.

And all the while Tessie courses the depths of the Lake, just has she has done, year after year, decade after decade.

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